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ABSTRACT

A retrospective evaluation of a Dean's Project at the University of Utah offers insights on the building of a program to prepare teachers to deal with mainstreaming. The program, funded federally, was begun in 1975 and was defunded in 1979. Reflections are made on what appear to be, in hindsight, mistakes in the way the program was developed. The project, headed by an Associate Dean, employed three professional staff persons, none of whom was on the college faculty. Consideration is given as to whether it would have been better to employ faculty members who would remain with the staff after funding ceased. The eight months spent in assessing needs for the program is seen as possibly wasted. It did not yield anything new, and special educators or educational publications could possibly have provided a needs list similar to the one that was obtained. By the time funding ceased, a variety of self-instructional modules had been developed, bibliographies and course outlines were created, a course was begun in counseling exceptional students, some media resources had been developed, and an interdisciplinary team teaching seminar and practicum was in action. These were all useful products. A model for interdisciplinary collaboration had been established in the school, and commitment to the goals of mainstreaming remains in spite of lack of funds for program development. (JD)

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IF YOU'RE DEFUNDED, ARE YOU DEFUNCT?*

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It has been approximately two years since funding for our Dean's Project was terminated. We knew the time would come when the funded project would cease--what we didn't know was that it would or could happen so soon.

We were defunded, but have not become defunct. We were defunded, and did become disgruntled, discouraged, and disillusioned. Little did we know then that this was just the beginning of an unfolding script that would see our School receive defunding or reduction of funds in several areas of operation. Two years later we have learned to anticipate the need for management of decline--the need for restructuring existing human and material resources to attain new goals. Budgetary trauma may still create shock for us, but does not singularly lead to immobilization.

If we aren't defunct, what are we? How much of our mission was accomplished and remains today? To help me understand and assess the situation, I interviewed the former principal parties in our Dean's Project--administrators, project staff, and faculty.

Prior to reporting these perceptions, I think it would be useful to review a few of the evolutionary milestones of the project. This may provide a more suitable context for understanding our thinking and perceptions today.

The project was initiated in the Fall of 1975. The impact of P.L. 94-142 was just beginning to be felt in the processes and procedures of public education. There were implications for preparation programs in higher education but statutory mandates did not exist for this educational level. Similarly we had no state mandate for higher education, nor does one exist today in Utah. The voice of NCATE was still silent. I mention these highly permissive variables because the change strategies that emerged during the project may well have assumed a different form and substance, if we had been operating under more formal mandates.

Superimposed upon this state and federal background was the School of Education that had been described as "a loose confederation of departments with an administrative structure that provided a common core of activity. Although isolated departments had their own missions, there was little interdepartmental discourse" (Perry, 1978, p. 1). The faculty were skeptical about interdepartmental collaboration. Initial faculty interviews clearly reflected their skepticism as shown in the following perceptions:

1. "Previous attempts had been unsupported by the chairperson.
2. "No incentive existed in the department.
3. "There was no reinforcement for development.
4. "Opportunities were limited to discuss needs with other faculty members.
5. "No one was qualified to take over classes, if participation involved missing classes.
6. "There was no money to place students in the field.
7. "Personnel were uncertain as to how to proceed in creating cross-departmental courses.
8. "Disapproval of colleagues was feared.
9. "Faculty members doubted that the full department would ever become involved in curriculum development." (Perry, 1978, p. 2)

Given this information, a formal strategy for change probably should have been articulated from the project's beginning. Unfortunately, the "aha" insights leading to such a need did not occur until we were a year or two into the project. Even then the model continued to evolve as required process steps became more concrete and specific.

We had projected development time. What we had not done was to allow sufficient time for formal evaluation and the institutionalization of all potential changes. As will be noted later, the problems of evaluation and institutionalization were most significantly manifested in interdisciplinary activities. It was in this arena that we lacked formal structures that could contribute to stabilizing change.

One of our biggest frustrations was the tenuousness of the time variable for the project. We didn't have a good sense of whether we would have one year, two, or three or more years, to accomplish the goals. This variability made prediction of time lines most difficult. The first year of funding was off-cycle, and consequently, after two months of operation we were expected to submit a new application with accomplishments. During our four years of operation we prepared three new proposals and, as you well know, the third one was defunded. Looking back, our change strategy probably should not have addressed program totality--encompassing all departments. It may have been more efficacious to address a single program at a time, using a three-year time frame. This, then, would have allowed us the opportunity to complete all the process steps. Subsequent applications would then have addressed new areas and eventually have provided the total mosaic of change we desired.

In retrospect, our evolved model of change assumed that "changes in practice will occur as persons abandon old values, attitudes, and relationships for new ones...more change in new knowledge or information is not sufficient...problem-solving capabilities of an individual or system must be improved so that new information can be properly used" (Coulson, 1978, p. 41). This, of course, was in contrast to using a power-coercive approach emphasizing political and economic sanctions or an impirical/rational model that assumes change will be adopted because its appeal is...rational and consistent with a person's or a group's self interest.

Self-evaluation suggests that initially we may have been too gentle in securing faculty involvement...maintained too low a profile in publicly advocating the mission...too afraid we could not convince without clear statutory or accreditation mandates. These, of course, are hindsights and speculations. We have been once again reminded that the processes of creation and development in the human enterprise are not perfect. While these dynamics did not

prohibit or prevent changes in our programs, they did slow them down, and may have interfered with our having felt a more complete and fulfilled sense of mission by the time of defunding.

Project Design:

The project was headed by an Associate Dean and employed three professional staff persons, all of whom had at least a Master's degree in some phase of special education. They did not have a faculty appointment. The role of the professional staff was viewed as enabling and facilitating to the involved faculty. During the course of the project and still, two years after, the question has been raised about the wisdom of having so-called outside staff for the nucleus of the project personnel, instead of resident faculty. For, once funding ceased, so did the key project personnel. There are some who believe that probability for institutionalization of change would have been even greater if the leadership had been centrally developed and stabilized within the faculty. The other side of the coin tells us that the system of faculty rewards did not lend itself to doing the "gopher work" project personnel were required to do. Involved faculty felt and still feel that their project involvement was not appropriately rewarded--rewards were more intrinsic than extrinsic.

A total of eleven faculty became centrally involved in project activities. Some of these individuals were nominated by department chairmen, while others volunteered after the project mission had been explained. A substantial percentage of the group were faculty leaders who were perceived by their colleagues as key individuals for facilitating change within the School. Participating faculty were given released time.

The project scenario unfolded in the following manner. After an extensive faculty orientation, a needs assessment was conducted in the public schools and within the School of Education. Both groups focused on the question, What types of training are deemed necessary to better equip regular education personnel

to work with exceptional children? There was a high degree of correspondence in the ranking of results for both groups, with the exception that the public school group gave a higher priority to working with parents. Those common items identified as important components for a preparation program were:

1. "Field experiences.
2. "Individualizing instruction.
3. "Communication skills.
4. "General information on handicapping conditions.
5. "Classroom management.
6. "Formal and informal assessment techniques." (Perry, 1978, p. 2)

These results were shared with the cooperating school districts and at least one of the largest districts in Utah used the results as a basis for its inservice training program. Similarly, the results were shared with the faculty within the School. It was from this matrix of need assessment results that specific project activities emerged.

In retrospect one must question whether the time and effort spent on the needs assessment was defensible in light of the results. It did not yield anything new, and one could have gone to any number of publications or asked special educators and come out with a similar listing. The task could have been completed in an hour instead of in approximately eight months. Given what we know today, such a criticism does appear to have high validity. Given the situation in 1975, when knowledge awareness about special education was still limited, there did appear to be value in going through the process, if for no other reason than to increase the awareness level within the education profession. Even with this rationalization, less time probably could have been spent on data collection. We also found that it was necessary to spend a great deal of time in developing a special education knowledge base in these regular educators before they could proceed with their individual activities. Large

and small groups for information sharing did not prove to be as efficacious as the individualized tutorial program evolved for each of the faculty as they engaged in their specific project areas. There was just too much diversity within a large group to be able to accommodate the individual interests and needs.

Project Products:

By the time funding ceased, the following products had been developed:

1. A variety of self-instructional modules to be used in various classes (law and special education; understanding the troublesome student, etc.).
2. Bibliographies and course outlines for use in classes in early childhood and elementary education.
3. A course in Counseling Exceptional Students for school counselors.
4. Slide/sound programs on topics such as media resources, principles of P.L. 94-142, locating and adapting materials for children with special needs.
5. An Interdisciplinary Teaming Seminar and Practicum.

Thus, at the end of four years we had developed a variety of products, modified some courses, enriched practicum experiences, and in the case of Early Childhood had examined and modified the entire curriculum in light of these new needs. But perhaps most important, a model for interdisciplinary collaboration had been established. Faculty and students had started to transcend the perceived territorial boundaries of programs for school administrators, school psychologists and counselors, nurses, social workers, early childhood, elementary, and secondary teachers, and special education personnel. They were collaborating and were working toward common goals.

Two Years Later:

What remains after two years without a funded project? What did we learn?

1. Change did occur within our School because of the project, and many of the products and processes of the experience are still evident today. Our disappointment results from not having moved far enough in full implementation during the project period. Nor have we been able to sustain the general momentum for the nature and direction of change as envisioned and advocated by the Dean's Project. Idealistically, there is no disagreement about the persisting need. Realistically, the problem focuses on trying to address this continuing need while attending to other increasing demands upon our School of Education. In addition, the pressures of rapidly-dwindling federal and state resources do not contribute to easy problem resolution. Perhaps our institution is unique in this dilemma, but I doubt it. The status of a "has been" should not be a forgotten position. If we are to continue to achieve the full intent of the Dean's Project mission, with or without federal monies, strategies must be developed to keep the "has been" institutions aware of what is transpiring in the national network. My presence today gives me renewed interest and challenge to go back and attempt to finish where we left off when funding ceased.

2. The project had its greatest impact on the eleven or more faculty who were intimately associated with the varied activities. These individuals became most enthusiastic about the experience, and have sustained this enthusiasm even though they are no longer directly involved. Many indicated they would gladly resume their previous level of activity if time and resources permitted. In them resides the hope that greater numbers of faculty will become more responsive. It is interesting to note that during the project these eleven had difficulty in motivating their other colleagues as to the need and importance of the mission. Today many of these colleagues are asking, What

should we do? A question not motivated by a professionally perceived need, but by a mandate--because an NCATE evaluation will occur next year.

3. While many of the products and processes are still in use today, the one activity that was perhaps the most innovative and educative was lost--the Interdisciplinary Teaming Seminar and Practicum. For it was here that the public schools and university had a common meeting ground. For it was here that faculty and students from several disciplines learned new roles and communication systems as they functioned as members of a team. For it was here that the theory of diagnosis and prescription had to be translated into the practice of developing Individual Educational Programs for real students. But why then did it happen? Face validity alone would dictate that every effort should have been made to sustain it. The Dean agreed, participants agreed, and for one year the Dean provided funding to sustain the project. But eventually everybody's problem became nobody's problem, and its demise resulted. This episode dramatically illustrated for us our neglected task of preparing for institutionalizing something of such merit. The seminar belonged to no one department, and during the extended year was sustained by faculty voluntarily contributing time and effort, in addition to their other work demands. Lack of faculty reward, unidentified ownership, diminishing state resources, and competing priorities all were contributing variables to the loss.

4. During the course of the most recent interviews, department chairmen reflected a surprisingly low level of awareness about contributions the project had made to our preparation programs. Yes, it has been two years! Yes, some of them were not in their present positions! Yes, many things have occurred since then! BUT--this observation may provide the key to a strategic error we made in bettering our chances for institutionalization of project activities. For you see, we literally did not involve them centrally in

formulating project policy and direction. Thus, by the time we were ready to implement, they had not made the necessary emotional-professional investment or commitment to the mission and goals of the project.

5. Another observation focuses on our Department of Special Education, because it did not seem to have central involvement in the project, nor has it aggressively moved to fill the void left by the demise of the project. Whether this was by chance or design we cannot ascertain, and yet this is my home department and that of my former Associate Dean. It may have resulted from our staffing pattern, or it may have been perceived as the Dean's Project--not Special Education's. Or, special educators may have kept a low profile because previous experiences with regular education proved too threatening for all concerned. Whatever the reason, I as a special educator strongly believe that new relationships require new ways of behaving for all parties concerned. As a mainstreamed special educator who became Dean, I am very convinced that the letter and spirit of P.L. 94-142 can only be fulfilled if new roles and relationships are established between regular and special education, as you so well know.

6. Finally, I believe our Dean's Project was realistic and successful. It did fulfill its role as a major change agent in the School. Perhaps it could have been even more effective if we had had a more well-defined system of formative and summative evaluation. Periodic use of outside evaluators may have helped us avoid some of our errors of commission and omission. Errors we finally discovered, but only after it was too late. We did learn through this experience, and these learnings do serve us as a valuable foundation in charting future courses of change.

So late, yet so smart!

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